Multi-Storied Homes

"... didn't matter what branch of the military you were from, or which flag your allegiance fell under, you watched out for those in the service and their brats because they would do the same for you."
– **Danae Ayusso, A Modern Fairytale: The Beast Within**

As kids, we never thought of ourselves as Navy Brats, but in truth, looking back, that is what we were. Well, surely not the 'brat' part so much.

Patti and Dick will tell you they have lived in seven different homes during their marriage; Penn and Fred have made it work for sixty years with just one Southern California purchase. How many we lived in growing up as Navy Juniors (a much more euphemistic term than "brats") in the 40s, 50s, and 60s. I was only in half a dozen, and the twins and I started Life in college...

Georgetown University Hospital was founded in 1898 as part of Georgetown University. The facility opened with 33 beds and was staffed by the Sisters of St. Francis. The Hospital moved to its current location on Reservoir Road NW in 1930 and this is where my mother and I found it on a Friday evening in early Fall 1941. I know 10 October 1941 was a Friday because my mother often told me the story that *she* remembered serving fish to my father when the time came for my arrival into this world. A former Catholic, Mom still lived by the rituals.

At this time, the United States was not yet officially in World War II, which was well underway. History records that on the day I was born, Georgy Zhukov (born the same year as my father, 1896) was called from Leningrad to Moscow to take command of the capital's defense, and Walther von Reichenau promulgated the Severity Order, encouraging German soldiers to murder civilians on the Eastern Front and thus paving the way for the mass murder of Jews. Grim times. But not in my corner of the world.

3807 Van Ness Street NW, Washington D.C. as seen in 2017.

Our home was about three miles north of the hospital, at 3807 Van Ness Street NW in Washington, D.C., a modest townhouse with a modest rolling hill in a 0.1 acre yard that later I was encouraged to roll down to the delight of my big sisters, who attended Phoebe Hearst Elementary School, about 0.3 miles away. Not for long, however, as we soon moved into the Naval Gun Factory, a sprawling 41 acres on the Anacostia River.

Naval Gun Factory on the Anacostia River.

The Gun Factory is today known as The Washington Navy Yard, but in 1941, it was a shipyard and ordnance plant and the oldest shore establishment of the U.S. Navy. It was involved in heavy ordnance construction; for example, its Foundry and Forge Division was building the deck lugs for the 5-inch 38 twin mounts destined for three destroyers then under construction. Other gear constructed were quadruple torpedo tubes, 1.1-inch machine guns, 5 and 6-inch mounts, and chromium plated guns. My father was not involved in these operations as he was a Navy Captain in 1941 and soon off to the Pacific, leaving us ensconced in relative luxury.

We lived in Quarters D, a three-story home with a basement, and what I most remember: a laundry chute that ran from the top floor all the way to the basement. You could drop anything in that chute, from any floor, and it would arrive in a basket in the basement at the speed of gravity. We lived in that great quarters throughout the war while my father was in the Pacific theatre, and indeed right up until my brother Peter was born in 1947. Even before I was born, President Roosevelt had selected the site and laid the cornerstone of the Tower at Bethesda Naval Hospital, on Armistice Day, November 11, 1940. Thus while Patti, Penny, and I were born in a civilian hospital, our young brother Pete was born at Bethesda – a true Naval Hospital that today is Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

I would walk home from play in a park, and later kindergarten, to the Naval Gun Factory, and on several cold days, the Marine Guard at the gate would invite me into the guard shack for a hot chocolate. What an ideal environment. What a secure world I enjoyed.

My sister Penny is credited with not only maintaining a diary, but having the capacity to relate memories from those early days, and for her Twinnie's birthday in 2017, she shared some of those grade-school memories:

> Remember that we have known each other more than 81 years! This means I have known you and you have known me longer than any other relationship on earth. Happy, happy 81st birthday to us. Yea us! Twinnies forever!
>
> Remember how, as small babies, we slept in Snuggle-Ducks that zipped up the back. Our hands were in "cups" so we could not suck our thumbs.
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> Remember how Mother had us in harnesses at the park so we would not wander away. (This is from a photo in the scrapbook).
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> Remember when we were small and Mother tried so hard to teach us to spell the word, "toast". She said the letters, "T' "O" "A" "S" "T" over and over and had us repeat the letters again and again. Then, the next day, Mother showed us the written word, "toast" and asked us to read it. We didn't have a clue what it said.
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> Remember we'd be in swings at the park and someone was pushing us? The swings had wooden bars across our laps so we wouldn't fall out. You loved it. You were the Brave Twin who shouted "Higher, higher!" I was the Scaredy-Cat Twin who shouted, "Stop the swing!"
>
> Remember when we were in kindergarten and Miss Hoffman, our kindergarten teacher, sent us both to the Speech Teacher because we couldn't say our "S's" very well. Also, we stammered. It was in speech class that the Speech Teacher commanded you, "STOP stammering! You are just copying your twin!"
>
> Remember summer evenings at 3807 Van Ness Street in Washington, DC during World War II from age 5 to 12. Next door, white-haired Mr. and Mrs. Ettinger and their grown-up daughter, Mary Ann, plus their big white Husky dog, Chumey, would sit on the front lawn and we would walk over to see them, then run around on the lawn and try to catch fireflies.
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> Remember our neighbor down the street, Donald Owen Nutter who proudly stated, "my initials spell my name". We took care of his turtle, Myrtle, one time, but one of us stepped on Myrtle by mistake and we had to flush smashed Myrtle down the toilet. DON was not happy.
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> Remember when Mother sent us to one ballet class at Phoebe Hearst Elementary School and we worked and stretched and wore ourselves out that day. It was hard! Afterwards, we told Mother that we "hated" ballet, it was "no fun" and we would never go again. And we didn't.
>
> Remember our summer at Mr. and Mrs. White's farm in Herndon, VA in 1945 when we were 9 years old? You had to go home early because you got sick to your stomach from

eating too much corn. You and Mother were downtown in Washington, DC when WW II ended and you reported later the excitement of everyone hugging everyone else in happiness.

Remember when Mother had us write our memories from the farm visit. The newspaper published the write-ups plus our pictures plus a cartoon of you, the Brave Twin, slapping the runaway cow with a stick while I hid behind a tree. The 4th grade teacher put it up on the bulletin board.

Remember when the war ended in 1945 and Daddy came home. We shouted in alarm, "Mother, a strange man just walked in the front door!!" Daddy wore a big smile and his Naval officer's uniform. I ran and hid behind the couch. You were the Brave Twin and greeted him first.

Remember the one surprise birthday party that Mother gave us in (about) 5th grade. I couldn't come downstairs because my fingers were stuck together with bubbles of poison ivy and Mother said I was "contagious." So I watched from the upstairs bedroom window as kids played outside. You were having loads of fun with everybody. Mother thought the kids' manners were horrific so that was our first and last party with kids.

Remember the one-act play, *The Little Lamp*, we did during 6th grade. I played Isabel, the mean girl who gets slapped in the face at the end. I think you were the "understudy". After that, whenever we had a fight, at home, Mother would tell me to flush "the mean Isabel" down the toilet. Lots of flushes.

Remember Mother sewing us lots of clothes after taking apart Daddy's old uniforms. She made us pinafores and also striped skirts with "secret pockets". Nobody could guess that pockets were in the skirt because the stripes hid their existence.

Remember the drops of cod-liver oil that we had to drink in a juice glass after coming home from school. 5 drops of cod-liver oil in the summer and 10 drops of cod-liver oil in the winter. We would hold our noses and drink. YUK.

Remember when Mother sewed huge brown bags for us to fill with autumn leaves. We would earn a penny a bag. After our first fill, we called, "Mother, ready for inspection!" Mother came out, took one look, and said, "Why these bags aren't filled!" Then she would squash all the dry leaves down to the very bottom. We were hopping mad.

Remember going to ice-skating on Monday afternoons in (about) 5th grade. We met these twins from Norway named Malfred and Torel. Afterwards we waited with them at the 5 & 10 cent store for our ride. They shoplifted items, thinking it "fun". We didn't and told Mother later.

Remember on the playground during the war when the kids surrounded Jules Laventhol and shouted at him, "You're a Jew. You're a Jew" and he cried. We didn't know what a Jew was and asked Mother. She became very angry at those kids and explained that Jews are like anyone else.

Remember when we walked home from Phoebe Hearst Elementary School and the patrol boys wore white badges across their chests? They put their arms out and we got to cross only when they put their arms down to show it was safe to cross. (No patrol girls at that time).

Remember when we played kickball at recess and we were always chosen first for teams (after Larry who lived in the Children's Home and was the best kicker).

Remember lugging bags to the library with all the biographies that Mother had us read? While the librarian refilled the bag from Mother's list, we read books in the Children's section.

Remember the linoleum floor at 3807 Van Ness and how we could play checkers on the floor design? Other times we used chairs in the living room with a sheet spread over for our secret cave.

Remember the scary cellar at 3807 Van Ness and how we would not go down there. One day Daddy had us go down to the bottom, one at a time, and stand a moment. We came up screaming and stayed afraid.

Remember how we rode the bus together in the summer to Rock Creek Park Day Camp each day with our lunch boxes? We sat on logs in a big circle and sang songs like "Cat-alina, Magalina, Hootinsteiner, Walentimer, Hogan, Logan, Bogan was her n–a–m-e!"

Later we did crafts and lanyards.

Remember how Granddaddy came to visit one Christmas and gave us "Sleepy Head" dolls. You could unzip the back and pack your pajamas. One doll was pink and one was blue. We immediately argued that we wanted the blue doll. Mother and Daddy were mad and embarrassed. Granddaddy smiled.

Remember how Mother made Granddaddy a "coddled egg" for breakfast and we watched how he carefully cracked the warm egg and scooped out the insides. Later we named coddled eggs, "a Granddaddy egg."

Remember how we first got the measles and then right after that, we came down with the mumps.

Remember how Mother would pour lots and lots of wheat germ into the stew so that we would stay healthy?

Remember how we lugged our ice skates all the way to our school, crossed over to the tennis courts and skated on bumpy ice? We also sled down the big hill, then walked back home in the frosty air.

Remember how we dressed up for Halloween as little Chinese girls at Mother's suggestion. The night was dark, windy and scary with lots of yells from other kids.

Remember when our brother Michael was born and we taught him to climb up the stairs by saying, “Here mook, here mook,” as we moved his cup up to the next step.

Remember the large wire pen in the front yard where Michael played in a sandbox with lots of toys. We played hop-scotch and jumped rope on the front sidewalk nearby.

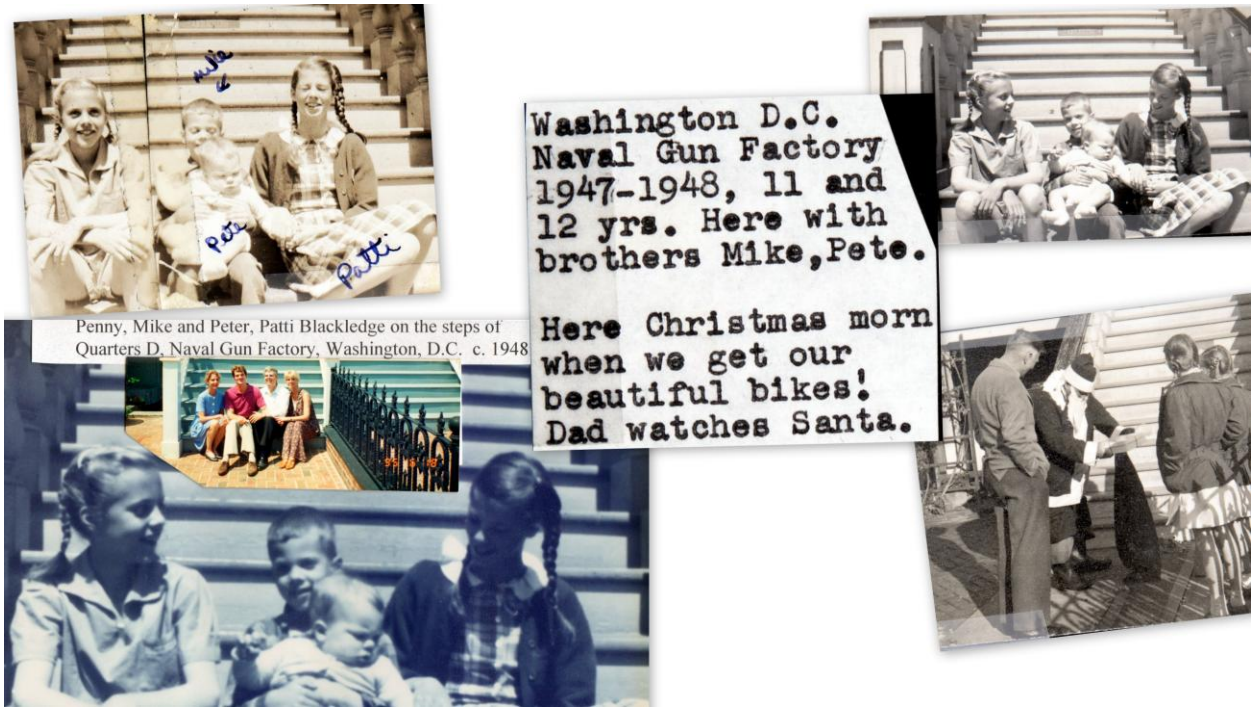
Remember how we pushed Michael in a buggy to pre-school called The Little House which was located right next to our elementary school?

Remember how we learned to swim at the downtown “Y” at age 10?

Mother promised us a prize if we would swim out to the pole held by the lifeguard. You, the Brave Twin, went first. This inspired me since you didn’t sink to the bottom. Our prize was a book called The Jolly Jump-up Family. All the pages featured 3-dimensional cut-outs that “jumped out.”

Remember how we went to a Girl Scout rally at the Washington Monument and Lady Mount Baton (founder of Girl Scouts) spoke to all the troops. We climbed the spiral staircase to the top of the Washington Monument and every so often we spit down the stairs to show how far we had climbed.

Remember when we moved from 3807 Van Ness Street in Washington, D.C. to the Naval Gun Factory, Quarters D in Washington, D. C.? A school bus driver named Perry drove us to 6th grade at Phoebe Hearst Elementary School.


Penny, Mike and Peter, Patti Blackledge on the steps of
Quarters D, Naval Gun Factory, Washington, D.C. c. 1948
Washington D.C.
Naval Gun Factory
1947-1948, 11 and
12 yrs. Here with
brothers Mike, Pete.
Here Christmas morn
when we get our
beautiful bikes!
Dad watches Santa.

Remember at age 12, Santa Claus came around on a truck, and we finally got blue two-wheeler bikes. We had been saving $ from our allowance for the bikes and had about $11 saved each. Mother made us pay her the $ back.

Remember how our sister Barbara married Jack Tipton in our living room at Quarters D? [Dec. 1946] Barbara had curled our hair for the wedding like the scrapbook shows. Mother was pregnant with Peter in that picture.

Remember how we sold Girl Scout cookies at the Admirals' houses and others at the Naval Gun Factory? Mother said, "Don't go inside any house."

Remember the Fire Station across from Quarters D. You/we broke the rule and went upstairs for candy from the fat telephone operator. Mother was mad.

Remember at Quarters D how Mother started us typing before we could go out and play with Mary Edson. Mother capped all the keys with blanks. For lesson one we had to type "f-j" space for several lines. It had to be perfect.

This last memory involving Mary Edson had an interesting "small world" twist: One day in 2016, our niece Debbie Tipton Lyon had an encounter with the real Mary in Naples, FL! I emailed her immediately:

Mary –

I called my niece, Debbie Tipton Lyon, at Tower Pointe this evening and learned that you had an interesting conversation with her not too long ago. As I understand it, you had lived in the Naval Gun Factory in Washington, D.C. and had known our family, in particular, my sisters Patti (then Patsy) and Penny Blackledge.

If my understanding is correct in this, I am sure that my sisters would love to talk with you. Can you provide your years when you lived at the Naval Gun Factory and your maiden name, so Patti and Penny might be able to place you. You can reach me at email: mike@blackledge.com or my mailing address is provided in the header. I can provide their contact info as well.

Mary responded as follows:

Jun 24 2016

Dear Mike,

I was pleased to receive your letter after talking to your niece, Debbie Lyon.

What a small world! I am the former Mary Edson and lived in Quarters E at the Gun Factory from the summer of '47 to the summer of '49. I had four older brothers, Steve, Jimmy, Peter, and Charles, and a younger sister, Alice. I am now 81 and I played with Patsy and Penny who were a year younger than I.

I remember many good times at the swimming pool! I believe that when we moved there Steve was in the Navy and never lived at the Gun Factory.
Steve, Jimmy and Charles have passed away.

I married John McDonnell, class of '55 at USNA. He was center on the Navy basketball team, and later in his career had command of the USS Dolphin, the Navy's deepest diving submarine, and then had command of the Naval Oceanographic Office.
. Unfortunately he died of cancer in 1984. In 1990 I christened the USNS John McDonnell, an oceanographic research ship, and just this month the ship which had been put out of commission by Obama was sold to a shipping company in Seattle and renamed the Sea Freeze! (awk!) I'm only telling you this because Debbie had said that you were a USNA graduate. My son, David McDonnell, is a USNA graduate also (class of '85) and now lives in Annapolis.

In 1992, I married Lou DePrisco, a chemist who managed explosive plants, and we moved to Naples, where we have lived since then. We moved to Arbor Trace in 2013, where we became friends with Dick Anderson, and after reading your sister Barbara's obituary, I perked up when I saw that she was the former Barbara Blackledge of the Naval Gun Factory.

I hadn't meant for this to be so long, but I don't too often get to talk to Navy friends. But one more tidbit: when I was first married I happened to be watching the Rose Bowl parade, and there were Patti and Penny as the queens. Small world!

Thanks for the note, Mike, and if you ever get back to Annapolis, please look up Dave. He's quite the party guy and was secretary of his class for several years and is a regular at tailgate parties.

Sincerely, Mary DePrisco

Mary -

So great to hear from you! Just last week, Penny told by email a story of the Naval Gun Factory, and ended it by saying, "Then I raced downstairs and outside to play with the Edsons, our next door neighbors." And here you are!

I have copied Penny (now prefers Penn) and Patti (via her husband Dick Blide). Your story is great, I will look forward to meeting your son in Annapolis. What an honor to have a ship named after your late husband.

Penn is on her yearly sojourn to Birmingham, England but does have email accessibility.

- *Mike Blackledge*

From: pwoods@socal.rr.com Jun 25, 2016

Hi Mary Edson,

Just read the email you sent to my brother, Mike. I'm writing this from the UK where Fred and I (married 58 years) accompany a son, Nick, 47, a high-school English teacher in southern California, as he works on a long-distance Ph.D in theology at the U of Birmingham each summer.

I have such wonderful memories of you as a terrific and active friend for Patsy (now Patti) and me next door in Quarters "D" of the Naval Gun Factory. Your athletic attributes amazed us as well as your energy and good nature. You were a whizz at basketball and everything else.

There was nothing you could not do. You flew and excelled at all the sports. In fact, you introduced us to a "jock" style of athleticism. You were energetic, funny and otherwise memorable.

You also introduced us to your brothers and younger sister, Alice. I remember your mother, as a beautiful, slim, smart woman. I recall Steve as blue-eyed, handsome and quiet. I do not recall Jimmy. I remember Charles as a prankster sort with his own style of speaking, and I recall Pete as long and tall with a glint in his eye, ready to challenge with jokester tendencies.

How you managed with 4 older brothers is amazing in itself. I think it made you resilient and ready-to-defend-no-matter-what. I recall your sister Alice, wearing blue, as a smiley, demure and quiet brunette, taking after her mom. I'm sorry to learn that three of your older brothers have passed.

I also recall the interior of your Quarters "E" even though I may have seen it only once or twice. I remember the Roman Catholic icons and the fact that you were a family versed in the Bible and the Church. That was new to me. Now, our older son, 49, is a pastor in Sugar Land, Texas at Sugar Land Bible Church and also a professor at the nearby College of Biblical Studies (CBS) in Houston, Texas. Both sons turned out to be 6 feet, 7 inches - which surprised us.

I'm writing to thank you for ingraining deep athletic memories into my brain. Fred and I, at 80 and 81, stay active here in the UK. We walk up to the Sports Centre from the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (no, we are not Quakers, but Christians) most days (45 minutes), then either swim or gym before walking back. We are "aging well" and Fred is now retired (@ 80)

from the California Appellate Court in Los Angeles so we make exercise a daily priority, (thanks in part to you!).

It was so nice to "hear from you" via the email to Mike. I just had to write and "say HI" and even though it was only a two-year "play-mate" relationship, it stayed with us, influenced our future life-style and showed us how strong and talented a female can be.

Long live Mary Edson!

Blessings, *Penny Woods*

Penny: Did you and Patti attend Phoebe Hearst during both of our homes in DC, both Quarters D and Van Ness Street? There is an article[1] on Phoebe Hearst Elementary, which still exists today, K thru 5th grade. Interesting to me, the article states that Phoebe Hearst is 'right behind' Sidwell Friends school, which is where the Clintons sent Chelsea, and the Nixons sent their daughters. I guess just you and Patti are on the 'famous alumni list' for Phoebe Hearst.

Penny responded to my inquiry of our multi-storied homes in D.C.:

Since we lived at the Naval Gun Factory for 2 years, that means that Patti and Penny were 11, then 12 and attended Phoebe Hearst Elementary School 5th and 6th grade. A rickety Navy bus, driven by Perry the bus driver, drove us and a handful of others to and fro each day. I remember the bus driving by the Lincoln Memorial and seeing ice skaters on the reflection pool.

Before that, of course, we lived at 3807 Van Ness Street and attended The Little House (behind the school) for activities and kindergarten through 4th grade during WW II. Many wonderful memories abound.

[1]The article at https://ghostsofdc.org/2014/02/04/hearst-elementary-school-dedication/ provides information from the November 15th, 1932 item in *The Washington Post*, reporting on the dedication of the school. The year prior, the First Lady, Mrs. Hoover, had attended the cornerstone laying ceremony.

> Described by Senator Royal S. Copeland, of New York, in his dedicatory speech, as "a worthy monument to the most public spirited woman of her period," the new Phoebe Apperson Hearst Elementary School at Thirty-seventh and Tilden streets northwest was dedicated last night with a program of music and oratory.
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> Senator Copeland traced the career of Mrs. Hearst, laying stress on the important work she did while in Washington in laying the foundation for the kindergarten system and launching the parent-teacher movement. As a member of the District committee of the Senate, Senator Copeland pledged the advancement of every possible effort in interest of the local public school system and expressed confidence that his fellow members on the committee entertained similar sentiments.
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> Two grandsons of Mrs. Heart, William Randolph Hearst, jr., and John Hearst, presented an aquarium to the school in behalf of their father, William Randolph Hearst. They took part in the corner stone laying ceremony of the school last year. Miss Catherine Watkins, director of kindergartens in the District, accepted the gift.